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THE MINSTREL PILGRIM

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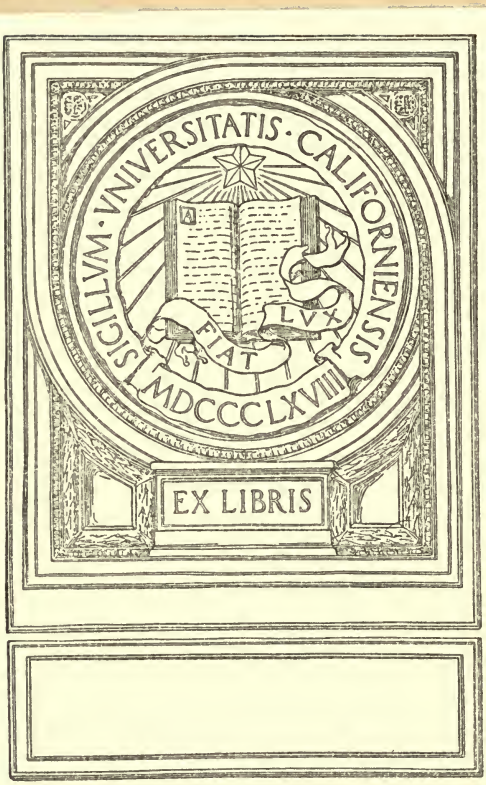
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THE

MINSTREL PILGRIM.

BY T. W. FIELD.

NEW-YORK:
PUBLISHED BY CLARK, AUSTIN & CO.
205 BROADWAY.
1848.

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THE MINSTREL PILGRIM.

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SYMPHONY.

When through the closing gates of day,
  Bright vistas we behold,
And Twilight trails along the sky,
  Her mantle fringed with gold,

When lingering day stands on the hills,
  And waits the veiled even,
While angel forms seem leaning o'er
  The battlements of Heaven,

The weary soul on wings of thought
  Seems fluttering in its clay—
A bird which views its native land,
  And pants to be away.

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By the moaning woods which hymned all day
Their chaunt in olden psalm,
I heard some old familiar tones,
Come sobbing on the calm.

And marked the traces of events
On memory's tear-dimned book,
Like half-filled footsteps seen beneath
The waters of a brook.

A hum of wings is on the air,
The shrill brook talks of showers,
And homeward bees along their track
Winnow perfumes of flowers.

From out the chambers of the night
The stars come starting forth,
Like sudden truths upon the soul
Which Reason's night gave birth.

I hear the wheels of universe
  Roll on their sphered round,
The awful march to which the stars
  Sweep through Eternity's ground.

When moonlight pales, a silent host
  From the mould of the churchyard spring,
While back and forth, with hollow moan,
  The forest branches swing.

I hear their shrouded garments trail
  Above the night weeds tall,
As misty shadows, white and frail,
  Sweep over the churchyard wall.

Within the old church's silent aisles,
  Where the light of their souls was shed,
When moonlight through the stained glass smiles,
  I can see the shrouded dead.

And hear the tramp of a mighty throng
When the solemn light grows dim,
And scattered notes as it sweeps along,
Of a distant, holy hymn.

And far off voices, low and sad,
Where the fitful moon-beam's stray,
Are heard in a dreamy dirge of life,
As the shadows melt away.

Then thoughts of mighty toil bestir
Impulses in my soul,
As to a prisoner's dream at night,
Rich strains of music stole.

And as sorrow gnaws my heart alway,
With beak so sere and thin,
One deathless thought, all night and day,
Keeps burning on within.

Oh! I would speak with mighty tone,
Ere in the Night of Life,
I sank in gloom and sorrow down,
One word of its solemn strife.

And I would utter calm and still,
One thought to linger yet,
That sculptured on the hearts of men,
The world could not forget;

One Statue Thought—that o'er the earth
Its god-like smiles would cast,
While round its base, men marked the trace,
Of the footsteps of the Past.

THE

MINSTREL PILGRIM.

Dream winged, the gentle hours of sleep have flown,
Silent and calm ; above the pilgrim land—
Sweet seraphs—how their dusky plumes have strewn
Peace, to tired hearts within that exile band.

Nature's pure things awake to greet the morn,
And catch the smiles sweet zephyr floats along—
Drinking the incense on its soft wings borne,
To breathe it forth in melody and song.

The mellow woods proclaim the summer o'er—
Their gold and crimson of an autumn dye,
The leafy parents, rainbow flocks swift pour—
On fluttering wings the brown leaves hurry by.

New England's vales, serenest of the wild!
A mellowed glow of ripening beauty feel.
A warmer flush where fruits and harvests smiled,
And ruddy Autumn reddens with her chill.

The woods are hushed—the hills in soft repose,
Hang wreath'd in mist, like dreams in childhood's sleep,
Embrowned earth a silent grandeur knows,
Which woods, and fields, majestic mourners keep.

The weeping willow droops its yellow hair
Twined by the fingers of a murmuring breeze,
And the gaunt sycamore stands silent there,
Lifting its great arms o'er the leafy seas.

The red leafed maple—beautiful in death;
The birch, whose silver bark is ringed with brown;
The deathless green of pines—veil all beneath
In calm—save when the ripe nuts rattle down.

Dead trees—the storied pillars of old time,
Where aged moss has set its feet of frost—
Solemn and lone, here stand like skeleton's grim
Of sentinels forgotten at their post.

With humble aim here dwell the patriot swains;
No rude ambition racks the pilgrim's breast;
Nor envy jars the rustic minstrel's strains,—
They live for heaven, and leave the world the rest.

And chief for heaven they tune the raptured lyre,
When bursts the dawn their strains with faith unfurl'd
Rush with the morn, and heaven's gates retire
To pour a flood of glory on the world.

Morn greets them gathered on the dewy mead,
While some gray patriarch with awe touched air,
And trembling voice, but giant faith doth plead,
And breathes on all the sweet incense of prayer.

That white haired patriarch life's dawn awaits,
When breaks the soul—swift from its prison dun,
Like some gray cloud at morning's dusky gates,
From which comes bursting, the immortal sun.

Scarce has the Night her ebon pinions furled,
The trembling dawn proclaims the day new born,
Swift on the clouds which veil the glowing world,
Stream up the golden tresses of the morn.

The groves a soothing melody inspire,
As earth's sweet dirge seems chaunted o'er the ground;
And whispering zephyrs wake the forest lyre,
Till numbers melt in pensive measure round.

Hark! As a sigh some hallowed griefs reveal;
From Earth, meek mother, breathes a grateful calm;
The murmuring woods a plaintive sorrow feel,
And Nature's mourners strew a holy balm.

Now roll away the gloomy shades of night,
And morn comes blushing on the ruddy hills,
While nature's voices speak the wide delight;
A general transport, through creation thrills.

The herd released with awkward gambols bound,
The flocks go bleating to the hills with joy,
The merry laugh speeds its contagious round,
And songs attend the reaper's sweet employ.

The plough-horse neighs to greet his generous lord.
With boisterous bark, the dog in circles wheels,
And joyous urchins tread the dewy sward,
While over all the hum of labor steals.

All now have settled to their sober toil,
The plastic axe and hammer's busy clang,
The plough-boy's whistle as he turns the soil.
With distant sheep-bells blend in rural song.

Now moping listless, with uncertain tread,
Or fitful speed that marked a wayward mind,
Hard by the brook a youth roamed o'er the mead—
His lute strings murmuring to the heedless wind.

Dim fancies stray along his moody soul,
While his brow wrinkles with their wayward trace;
Then starting, as some thought of passion stole,
We see what sorrow speaks that gentle face.

Oh! What a wreck of human loveliness!
The soul's a prisoner in that shattered cell,
Now lit with smiles—some angels sweet caress—
And now a maniac stare its sorrows tell.

There was a summer beauty on that face,
Where maidens gazed and wondered why they wept;
And sweet drops wet his lips, as breathing low
They pressed their kisses on them while he slept.

Unchidden oft he stole his lips to theirs,
Twining his white arms round, with girlish grace;
Kissing the tear drops—some sweet maiden's tears
Who wept, to mark the wan destroyer's trace.

The gray old patriarch blessed him with fond smiles,
And guessed him victim of some secret wrong;
While matrons tearful, owned his gentle wiles,
The swain's rude soul was ravished by his song.

His heart's deep mysteries hid his secret tale,
No tongue could speak the mystery of his birth;
'Twas only known, he wandered to the vale
One day, when summer smiled upon the earth.

Their homely welcome and their rustic joys,
Soothed his wild sorrows with a grateful calm;
But, ah! How woe the soul's sweet chords destroys,
Thought's air born music jarred in wild alarm.

No marble science chilled his glowing thought,
Nor learning checked his fancy's daring wing,
His soul by nature's awful sculpture wrought,
Mirrored her form like statues from a spring.

His soul awaking with celestial song,
By Heaven itself was touched with living fire;
And as its notes of rapture fled along,
Sweet nature strung with awful chords his lyre.

And now his steps by wayward impulse led,
Slow sorrow drags his sickening course along;
Or the light thistlet tempts his fitful speed,
Then his lute's warblings mock the brook's hoarse song.

Sometimes with idle touch and absent air,
His low, sad lute a broken dirge-strain flings,
Then its wild chords some fitful passion bear,
As fancy guides the spirits trembling strings.

Years calmed the sorrow of his phrensied soul,
Where reason oft held her majestic sway,
And passion owned his manhood's strong control,
While solemn grandeur sometimes woke his lay.

But slow disease crept softly o'er his frame,
The torture of a mind that frets in chains;
And gnaw his heart, the serpent teeth of shame,
Till life slow sickened by the venom wanes.

At eve he wandered with unsteady feet
Where through the glade which sheltered by a wood.
With verdure mocked gray autumn's tawny sheet,
A brook o'er gaunt roots poured its noisy flood.

Adown the steep of Heaven flies the day,
And twilight trips along the gloaming mead,
Her dewy robe shakes off its glittering spray,
On fragrant flower cup, and the nodding weed.

The bat swift wheeling on capricious wing,
Oft startles such as wander near her round,
The moaning ring dove in her chilly nest,
Sends back the whippoorwil's complaining sound.

Now Shepherd Day upon the distant hill
Calls home his lingering rays to fold in dreams,
And his sweet form departing calm and still,
Leaves on the clouds his souls reflected beams.

The flowers are sleeping in their beds of dew,
With tiny wings closed round their cups again,
Where vagrant bees forgetful whence they flew,
Sleep like young dreams upon an infant's brain.

See, from the world of dreams dim Silence comes,
Mother of thought, she leads a fairy train,
Whose dreamy presence stills the insect hums,
But wakes the poet to his living strain.

While o'er his brain the teeming fancies play,
Like fire-winged insects mirrored in the stream,
There glorious shadows of unseen things stray,
And wrap his mind in drapery of dreams.

Now sobbing dirges murmur on his lute—
And now a wail of anguish fills the air—
Then as its sleeping chords lie hushed and mute,
Hark! How his frantic soul bursts out in prayer.

"Oh, God! Thy world is beautiful with love;
I feel its glories imaged on my soul;
Thy smile has made it radient from above,
Oh, let me still live on and love the whole.

"I see the sun, above whose monarch brow
Dark clouds hang fringed with molten rays,
As o'er the golden disk of my soul now
Sail sorrow's clouds, plumed with thought's gorgeous blaze.

"Down to the sad brown earth on slanted clouds
I see the angels run with steps of light,
While 'mid the fringes of the sweet days shrouds,
Float up the ebon tresses of the Night.

"I see the gorgeous banners of the sky,
With braided strands of ebony and gold,
O'er heaven's towers float vast and heavily
As half the sky slept in each ocean fold.

"There sail the war ships of the vaster deep,
With lightnings pregnant swell their raven sails;
On their huge breasts the red winged seraphs sleep,
One cloud—a skeleton ship before them sails.

"Oh, lovely Earth! Thy soul is in my dreams,
I feel thy woods and waters sad sweet smile,
As in some gentle autumn day it seems;
Dear Father—let me love it yet awhile.

"Oh, God! 'Tis beautiful; let me live on,
I will not harm thy world; but I will love
Each atom, as I love yon peerless sun—
Sweet Heaven let me dream of thee and love.

"I would not vex thy mercy with sad prayers,
But oh! My soul is fainting now with death—
I am all sick at heart—my dim eye glares,
Hear me sweet Christ, my life gasps out this breath.

"I see the fainting glories of the earth,
Pale in the presence of the bashful night;
The sky, which mirrored heaven from its birth,
Fling its last glory on the sad day's flight.

"Steep over steep of purple blent with gold,
And palaces with many a burning spire,
Vast wings of flame which sleeping lightnings fold,
Like birds whose wings conceal a zone of fire.

"I see the Night with stealthy footsteps come,
As day retreats along the well fought sky;
But a dim presence whispers me of doom—
Oh God! How sad a thing it is to die.

"Beautiful Earth—thy presence is a joy
That sleeps upon my soul when day is fled;
Shall my calm spirit keep its sweet employ,
And like a dream float near thee when I'm dead?

"Shall thy far hills, and cloud throned waters gleam
Calm on my sense as in a summers day,
When faint with love on some tall cliff I dream,
With woods and lakes, and mountains far away?

"I hear sweet voices murmuring in the wood,
An evening anthem trembles on the air,
But oh! my soul is fainting; with that flood
Of music mingles my heart's bitter prayer.

"Oh Spare me Father, yet a little while,
I have not seen the frost of white haired years;
Oh! let me feel the sun's warm gladsome smile
Long time e'er I descend into the vale of tears.

"Dear, Father! I am in the green of life,
I have not come sin-blighted to my grave.
And trembling beg thee to renew its strife,
But I have loved all things which thou gave.

"Oh, yet a while—I cannot leave them now,
But, ah! What freezing touch has grasped my brain,
And these cold fingers flitting o'er my brow—
Sweet Heaven—'tis death—then pass loved earth—'tis vain.

In vain his prayer—the phrensied soul is driven
Forth from its home, by stern unpitying death,
But Hope, sweet being, whispers dreams of heaven,
And its low music steal's his parting breath.

No sounds along the veiling earth awake,
Where darkness hovers on her ebon wing,
Save one late oar which sweeps the distant lake,
And many harsh brook's drowsy murmuring.

There on its bank with fainting limbs he lay,
As if he listened to the brook's hoarse song,
Or watched the landscape as it gloamed away,
But death's dull languor stretched his limbs along.

The still-born words have perished on his lips,
Though winged like angels for a lofty flight;
His thoughts have died, like bees on flowers they sip,
Their life expiring ere they saw the light.

A wave of madness heaves upon his soul,
O'er which had rolled the tempest of despair,
Reason flies shipwrecked on its desert shoal,
Lit by the lightnings of some passions glare.

No more his soul is vocal with sweet thought,
  But frantic numbers linger on his tongue,
Death riots 'mid the ruin he has wrought,
  While Hope disheveled o'er his madness hung.

No more shall Fancy wakeful at his call,
  Sweep o'er his lyres enraptured strings again,
That trembling, wake in deaths untuneful thrall,
  And strew sweet notes in their discordant strain.

Dark on his vision swims the dizzy night,
  The gray robed world grows hoary on his view,
While whispering shades illure his pregnant sight,
  And teems with life the landscape's dusky hue.

Unawed as slow the unconscious head he droops,
  The careless brook its jarring laughter wakes,
And brown leaves rustle by in shadowy troops,
  When zephyr's hand the parent forest shakes.

Now raves the soul along her crumbling cell,
Blending sweet notes amid her murmurings,
Now breaks that heart in which she loved to dwell,
And soars the spirit on her bursting wings.

He sleeps at last—the sleep which knows no morn,
Fond Nature weep—thy sweetest child is dead,
In vain the lavish springs his bed adorn,
The soul of Fancy with his numbers fled.

No virgins trembling with the bliss of love,
Shall wreathe his harp, or list the enraptured strain,
Or own the raptures which his numbers move,
Or wake the soul of melody again.

Oft shall the hinds as listless by they tread,
With awe checked lip—their jocund mirth repress,
With graver step pass by this turf crowned bed,
Soft maids shall bathe its bloom in melting tenderness.

REQUIEM.

A bright Pain came, to a poet's heart,
And sat on its pulseing throne;
And woke the sleeping chords with its smart,
Till his soul was breathed in song.
Then nestled amid its golden dreams,
And there like a beautiful serpent lay,
Till it eat the poet's life away.

A golden flame burnt on his brain,
With Thought's bright visions fed,
While Fancy's wings had fanned the flame,
And thousand beautiful phantoms came,
Sad tears on the soul were shed;
For there a beautiful statue lay,
Twas Reason—sweet thing, was dead.

A dazzling glory throned his brow,
Where Thought's pale fingers traced
Its sculptured lines of intellect,
And Passion's burning feet had passed,
Over the sweet soul's mournful waste;
In the lightning paths of madness led,
On wings of fire his fancies fled.

A whirlwind of thought had passed
Through the dim void of mind,
And the wreck of a human soul was cast
Like a ship on some golden strand.
An awful glory his brow enshrined,
As it were the work of a sculptor's hand,
By a maniac god designed.

And now the strains of his lyre awoke,
Their deathless melody of song,
A tide of celestial madness broke
Like the gush of a seraph throng,
Blent with the shrieks of despair;
For the angel of sorrow had breathed on the lyre
And wailed as it sped along.

Calm and sad on its snowy wings
His soul had drooped in its own sweet ray,
Like some white dove in the moon's moultings
That droops with death on its silver wings—
Fron his bursting soul, two dark thoughts stray,
Like the ebon wings of a raven borne
Through the rent of a white sail cloud at morn.

Sweet Fancy breathed upon the strings,
Of the lyre she was wont to sweep;
And wake the wild celestial things
That on the chords of the spirit sleep
In folds of golden imageings.
But a trembling dirge awoke its strain
And breathed a gush of angelic pain.

"In that dark hour of parting gloom,
When pressed your burning lips to mine,
And the mute soul seemed bursting through
The eyes where still despair did shine;
Oh! When in that embrace—the last,
Your kiss went maddening to my brain,
Why did the soul not pour its life
Out in that kiss, and end its pain?

" Again in dreams I clasp your form,
Your kisses riot on my lips,
And that low voice awakes my soul
Till the crazed dreamer madly weeps.
And then again, comes back that scene,
That night of madness and despair;
The burst of woe—the wild farewell—
The agony of hopeless prayer.

" The lingering gaze which treasures yet
The last—the maddening look on thee,
And woman n'er wilt thou forget,
Its prayer of silent agony.
And then the madness when I rushed,
A stricken thing from that dread spot,
Which made my soul a living void
Where only memory slumbers not.

No more the chords, wild Fancy sweeps,
To wake their notes of fire;
But a gentle one beside him weeps—
Tis Hope—sweet thing its vigil keeps,
And strikes the tuneless lyre.
And thus the Poet's spirit fled,
But the pain sits on his brow,
With lines of anguish furrowed.
And Fancy lingers while she weeps.
For Hope is smiling on his lips.

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS.

PURPOSE.

I saw the vampire Wrong feed at the heart
Of nations. All things beautiful and good,
Wasted and shrunk before the monsters touch.
But yester, some all wise and glorious stood
Strong in the majesty of peace and love,
Now but the fragments of some fall'n greatness.
While serpents nestled in the breasts of men
Making a horrid lair in homes of love and truth.

Then I said, I will be fearless, wise, and calm,
Making the sick earth glad where e'er I go,
With trust and hope right cheerfully press on
Through giant wrongs—Conscious God's truth has right
At all times to be spoken. Alway sift
The gold of Science from the sands of time,
Reaping life's harvest ever of good deeds,
And blessings to be garnered in Eternity.

So must I toil, and hope, through life's long day,
With giant faith and solemn calmness wait,
Perhaps worn down with watching, tread the vale
Of man's last darkness, sorrowing and alone.
Yet shall these deeds I've strewn along life's waste,
—Leaving the track of mercies all unseen—
Like foot-prints lost on earth appear in heaven.
Trusting while blessings I have strewn around,
I shall not fail at last—fearless and calm
Await the awful hour which waits for none,
And sleeping trustful—wake in heaven.

THE MANIAC.

A living statue; whence a mind has fled—
A shattered form of the Eternal stands,
Proud in his agony, though hope is dead
Silent and thoughtless 'mid life's high commands.
There the proud spirit plumes its wings in vain,
For red eyed Madness sits; and clanks its freezing chain.

The cold stern skeleton of Thought is there,
And sickly fancies o'er his features stray,
Through lines where burning tears have seared their way,
A living grave—a palace of Despair.
While brooding o'er the waste—a ruined thing,
Within his bosom sits the soul with folded wing.

How round his brain unhallowed fancies rave,
The charnel of a thousand glorious thoughts,
Where ghostly fears dance on their blighted grave,
Cold Memory hides them with a thousand blots.
His life, when all has fled that could not die,
Is like a tearless woe, or some dim sightless eye.

SORROWING.

Hark ! 'tis the midnight of the soul again.
From awful sleep, which seemed another life
With gorgeous thoughts, and shapes majestic rife,
I wake—But ah ! to find that elder life a pain
I hoped was dream, for woman still to thee,
The loved and lost, looks back my soul in agony.
Like burning steel, these memories pierce my brain,
Once more I feel that avalanche of scorn
Crushing my soul to earth, with deathless pain,
And the sweet veil of Hope's delusion torn;
Oh God ! no rest for me so crazed and worn.
I feel cold Madness, like a venomed snake,
Coiled mid sick fancies which his poison make,
Creeping with horror, through each swelling vein,
While one by one the chains of reason break.

THE INFANT

An awful guest has come to us,
A messenger of heaven,
No words he has but looks the speech
The loved he left had given.

The lids are folded on his soul
But his lashes move alway
As if he felt the winnowing
Of tiny wings that stray,

Like young birds hovering o'er blind eyes,
Or thoughts around the soul;
To win the wanderer back to heaven
From whose sweet guard he stole.

A wondrous thing sleeps in that mind
  Unconscious of its power,
Its thoughts unfolded like the leaves
  Around a new-born flower.

Its soul is flashing in its smile
  And darkens in its griefs,
As sunbeams that are hid awhile
  And seen through waving leaves.

While faint and sad we wanderers stray
  Till hope delays to come,
Like children drooping at their play,
  God calls the weary home.

Our thoughts fly thick and fast to heaven
  When age has dimmed the eye,
Like flower leaves by the tempest driven
  When every leaf is dry.

THE IDIOT.

In yon rude form sleeps an immortal soul—
An angel, death will startle into flight,
As the winged dead will burst the tomb's long night,
So that white soul, shall issue from its cowl.
Now frantic with its doom in phrensy's hour
Shakes its crazed dwelling with a maniac power.

The eyelids of the soul are closed on it
Though sometimes reason's glimmerings burst the dark
As through the rents of thunder clouds we mark
A silver fleece with heaven's own radiance lit;
Lighting the darkness of the soul again,
To show its wrecks strewn o'er the spirit's main.

There Passion broods and droops her sullen wing,
Though through the ebon curtain of the mind,
The lightning thoughts of madness often spring,
Leaving its crimson edges rent behind.
Only a sense of nothingness and dream,
His life one long unreal; sinks in death's cold stream.

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FINALE.

Through silent woods I climb a mountain's side,
O'er myriad footprints of past travellers, tread—
The willow waves its mournful tresses wide,
O'er awful shades, where sleep the countless dead.

Where leads this thronging track? On some tall mound
With awe I backward gaze, and see it come
From a calm vale, beyond whose still profound,
Hangs the gray curtain of autumnal gloom.

Away towards the mountains top I gaze,
Where awful gloom forever hath reposed;
Sometimes blue spaces see through gaps of maze,
As the cloud eyelids of far lake unclosed.

Again I climb, yet know not where I go,
Through tears I sometimes see when clouds are riven,
Calm glory flashing from the mountains brow,
And onward pressing thither, hope tis heaven.

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